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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Rights, schools and communities: Plan to increase French-language school enrollment in minority contexts

Dr. Dyane Adam, Commissioner of Official Languages, released a study today on the current state of education in French-speaking minority communities. The study, entitled *Rights, Schools and Communities in Minority Contexts: 1986-2002*, was carried out by Angéline Martel, a professor at the Télé-université du Québec. It analyzes the trends in enrolment in French-language schools and the recruiting challenges faced by these schools, as well as identifying initiatives to be taken over the next decade to attract more of this target population.

At the start of the 1960s, instruction in the minority language was provided at the elementary and secondary levels only in Quebec. Since 1982, section 23 of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* has guaranteed the right to instruction in the minority language. When it came into force, there were no French-language schools in half the provinces of Canada. Nearly twenty years later, governments have taken important steps to strengthen the French-language school system and give parents' representatives responsibility for their management. Our research shows that French language schools are providing instruction to a larger percentage of the target school population (54% in 1996, compared to 45% in 1986). However, only about half of children born to parents whose mother tongue is French are enrolled in a French-language school in a minority community.

Schools play a central role in the development of the minority communities. According to the Supreme Court of Canada, section 23 is intended to remedy, at the national level, the progressive historic erosion of the official language communities. "It is clear that much work remains to be done to attract more of this potential pool of students to French-language schools. The vitality of the French-speaking minority communities depends on their ability to ensure that their young people are properly schooled in French. The work is far from complete, and section 23 has not yet shown its full potential," the Commissioner said.

The challenge, therefore, is to increase enrolment in these schools in order to strengthen the vitality of the French linguistic minority communities. This study proposes a plan to attract more of the target school population over the next ten years. To achieve this objective, the Commissioner believes that a number of key players will have to be mobilized: political leaders, the French language school boards, the leaders of the Francophone and Acadian communities, education professionals and, above all, families, who will have to be made aware of the importance of passing the French language on from one generation to the next. "All the players will have to work together to strengthen the school as a welcoming environment and a centre of excellence connected to its community. The future of French in Canada depends on this," Dr. Adam concluded.

Information



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